



United. Banana farmers display their products at Ekikoona Matooke Market in Mbarara Municipality recently. The farmers have formed an organisation to foster their business. PHOTO BY ALFRED TUMUSHABE

# Banana farmers unite to improve prices, produce

**Organised.** The farmers have formed a union, which intends to mobilise existing banana growers' organisations, spearhead formation of new ones and bring them together, among others.

BY ALFRED TUMUSHABE  
atumushabe@ug.nationmedia.com

**ANKOLE.** Banana farmers in Ankole sub-region have formed an organisation, Uganda Banana Producers Cooperative Union, to shore up growing of the crop, improve marketing and promote proper handling.

The production and actors in banana value chain face challenges of banana bacterial wilt, low farm gate prices, unscrupulous middlemen, declining soil fertility and unpredictable and extreme weather conditions, according to Mr Asaph Mugizi, the organisation's chairman of board of directors.

ing from poor handling methods and forms of poor presentation (in markets) and limited value addition are the other setbacks.

The union, spearheaded by banana farmers from Ankole sub-region, was registered with Uganda Cooperative Alliance in February, and has seven primary cooperative societies.

The State minister for Cooperatives, Mr Fredrick Ngobi Gume, launched the union on August 25, at Mbarara Zonal and Agriculture Research Institute.

Mr Mugizi, who also served as chairman of Mbarara District Farmers Association, says the challenges cannot be overcome without the banana farmers coming together.

"Banana producers are small holder farmers scattered in different villages and are not organised. Each farmer grows their own choice of varieties and use own methods. This complicates marketing and value addition."

## FACTS

**Big producers.** About 75 per cent of farmers in Uganda grow bananas for food and income security. Ankole and Kigezi sub-regions contribute more than 60 per cent of the estimated 10 million tonnes of bananas produced in Uganda annually.

of uniform products," Mr Mugizi says.

Presently, there are not many primary societies for banana farmers.

The intention of the union is also to mobilise existing banana growers' organisations, spearhead formation of new ones and bring them together.

Those who have joined the union include Kakerere Rural Cooperative Society (Mbarara), Kigarama Matooke Cooperative Society (Ntungamo), Kyabugimbi Area Enterprise Cooperative Society (Bushe-nyi), Kajaka Investment Cooperative Society (Mbarara) and Kashozi Matooke Cooperative Society (Sheema). Others are Biharwe Matooke Producers Cooperative Society (Mbarara) and Rwenshonzi Farmers' Cooperative Society (Mbarara).

The champions of the union also expect to bring on board banana farmers in Kabarole, Bunyangabu, Wakiso, Rakai, Luweero, Tororo, Jinja, Dokolo, Mbale, Sironko and other banana growing districts.

"Banana production in other parts of Uganda is not as vibrant as it is in south western. Here [in Ankole], people have interest; and it's both a commercial and food crop. Through collaboration with researchers at National Agricultural Research Organisation (NARO), we established that

## briefly

### Residents go to polls

**BUNYANGABU:** Residents of Bunyangabu District are expected to vote for their leaders for both district chairperson and Woman MP today. Bunyangabu was carved out of Kabarole District and started operations on July 1. Three people are vying for the Woman MP seat, including State minister for Gender and Culture Peace Mutuuzo (NRM), Ms Dorothy Nyakaisiki (FDC) and Ms Lydia Kiiza (Ind). Mr James Ategeka (NRM), Mr Silver Tweyongere (FDC) and Mr Richard Mugazi (Ind) are tussling it out for the district chairperson seat. [Alex Ashaba]

### District passes resolution

**KAKUMIRO:** Kakumiro District council on Tuesday unanimously approved a motion supporting Parliament to amend the contentious Article 102 (b) of the Constitution to remove the age limit for the president. The motion was tabled by Birembo Sub-county councillor, Mr Eria Twebaze, before an extraordinary council sitting presided over by the district speaker, Mr Joseph Ajuna Byarugaba. Mr Onesmus Twinamasiko, the Bugangaizi East MP, who is in support

# Banana farmers unite to improve prices, produce

FROM PAGE 9

**Voices**



"When you go to supermarkets in Kenya, you will find well-packed fresh bananas because of good handling. If biscuits made from wheat can be packed in such attractive ways, why can't matooke be handled in the same way? It is possible, the union will look at all those issues,"

ASAPH MUGIZI, UGANDA BANANA PRODUCERS COOPERATIVE UNION CHAIRMAN OF BOARD OF DIRECTORS



"We shall use their platform to address some of the challenges such as banana bacterial wilt and also promote new technologies. We have developed new banana varieties to improve yields. The technologies will easily be adopted since we shall be reaching big number of farmers."

SEDRACK MUHANGI, BANANA EXPERT WITH NARO MBARARA

bananas can as well thrive in other parts of the country. It only takes passion and concentration, and that's part of our agenda," says Mr Mugizi.

Uganda's bananas are mainly exported to UK, South Africa and South Sudan.

However, Kampala, Mbarara, Masaka and other big town provide the biggest local market.

Farmers in Mbarara, Isingiro and Sheema currently sell a sizable bunch of bananas between Shs20,000 and Shs40,000. However, prices can drop to as low as Shs3,000 and Shs 10,000 during production peak periods in June and July.

Through partnership with government and non-governmental organisations, the union seeks to promote irrigation and application of fertilisers for consistent production and value addition like making wine and other products such as cakes so as to get maximum returns from farming.

Mr Hannington Beyendeza, the chairperson of Kashozi Matooke Farmers and Traders Cooperative Society, says before the formation of the union, farmers lacked a common voice.

"Banana farmers have not been together. This has led to lack of a common voice. Middle men take a lot of our money. We are hopeful that with the union in place, we shall go to market with a common voice. We shall go to government as a team," says Mr Beyendeza.

Mr Mathias Tushaboomwe, the chairperson of Rugaaga Matooke Cooperative Society, says through the union, banana farmers can harmonise how to sell, secure external markets and even help members who have urgent financial needs.

"We currently use our eyes to determine monetary value of bananas; you just look at the size. We need to agree that we should begin weighing bananas and sell in kilogrammes. Through the union, we believe we can secure external markets," says Mr Tushabomwe.

Mr Sedrack Muhangi, a banana expert with NARO Mbarara, says with the formation of the union, scientists will find it easy to disseminate information on farming practices and popularise technologies.

**briefly**

Woman kills twins

RUKUNDA

Man